CLAIMS

1.   A communications system, comprising:

an advice provider which broadcasts information over a communications medium;

an advice consumer for gathering said broadcast information from said communications medium; and

a reader associated with said advice consumer for determining relevance of said broadcast information;

wherein said advice consumer is advised of said information only if said information meets certain predetermined relevance criteria.

2.   The system of Claim 1, wherein said reader further comprises:

means for providing relevant information to said advice consumer without revealing any aspect of said advice consumer's identity to said advice provider.

3.   The system of Claim 1, wherein relevance of said information to said advice consumer is based upon any of the properties of an advice consumer's computer, said computer's contents or state, or the properties of a local environment associated with said computer.

4.   The system of Claim 2, wherein said advice consumer maintains anonymity, privacy, and security by not revealing to said advice provider either that said advice consumer is interested in information from said advice

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provider, that said advice consumer has received any particular message, or that said information is relevant to said advice consumer.

5.   The system of Claim 1, wherein said information being broadcast may consist of any of humanly-interpretable content, data, or software tools.

6.   The system of Claim 1, wherein said advice provider specifies an audience for whom said information is potentially relevant by referring to properties of an advice consumer which are used to determine the relevance of said information to said advice consumer.

7.   A communications method, comprising the steps of:
       preparing a message at an advice provider location;
       broadcasting said message to potential advice consumers anonymously using a network;
       processing said message at an advice consumer location;
       determining whether said message is relevant to said advice consumer;
       wherein said message is broadcast to advice consumers to whom it is relevant without requiring that said advice consumers divulge their identity or attributes to said advice provider.

8.   In a system including computational devices connected by a communications network, a communications apparatus for linking an information provider to information consumer, comprising:
       specific units of advice to be shared;

digital documents conveying said advice;

an advice provider for broadcasting said advice in the form of advisories;

an advice consumer for receiving said advisories;

wherein advisories are broadcast over said communications network from said advice provider to said advice consumer; and

a communications protocol for narrowly-focused targeting of said advisories to said advice consumer by automatically matching advisories with an advice consumer for whom said advisories are relevant.

9.   The apparatus of Claim 8, further comprising:

an advice reader associated with an advice consumer computer for performing relevance determination.

10.   The apparatus of Claim 9, wherein relevance determination is automatically performed based on a combination of conditions, including any of hardware attributes, configuration attributes, database attributes, environmental attributes, computed attributes, remote attributes, timeliness, personal attributes, randomization, and advice attributes.

11.   The apparatus of Claim 9, wherein said advice reader operates automatically to determine relevance.

12.   The apparatus of Claim 9, said advice reader comprising:

a gatherer for gathering advisories to which said advice consumer subscribes;

a subscription manager for entering subscriptions to advisories based on information in at least one advice consumer site definition file;

an unwrapper for parsing said advisories;

a module for determining the relevance of said advisories, said determination being made either continuously, at scheduled intervals, or under user manual control;

a user interface that receives relevant advisories; and

a display and management system that displays relevant advisories for inspection by said advice consumer.

13.   The apparatus of Claim 8, wherein any information that is actually on an advice consumer computer or reachable from said advice consumer computer may be used to determine relevance.

14.   The apparatus of Claim 8, wherein said advisories comprise:

digital documents which contain an explanatory component describing in terms said advice consumer can easily understand the reason that said advisory is relevant and the purpose and effects of the action which is being recommended to said advice consumer.

15.   A communications apparatus, comprising:

an advisory comprising:

a relevance clause comprising an assertion about the state of an advice consumer computer, its contents, or environment which can be automatically evaluated by comparing said assertion with said advice consumer computer's actual state;

a message associated with said relevance clause whose suitability for the consumer is determined at least partially by the evaluation of said relevance clause;

a gatherer for assuring that relevance clauses flow into said advice consumer computer from various locations;

a watcher for evaluating relevance clauses by comparing them with an actual state of an advice consumer environment, and by inspecting properties of said advice consumer computer and its environment and checking if these point towards or away from relevance; and

a notifier for displaying messages to an advice consumer under at least partial guidance of an evaluated relevance clause.

16.   The apparatus of Claim 15, said advisory further comprising any of:

a wrapper for packaging information in said advisory for transport and subsequent decoding;

a from line fort identifying an advice author;

a subject line fort identifying the concern of said advisory;

a relevance clause for specifying conditions under which the said is relevant;

a message body for providing explanatory material explaining to said advice consumer what condition is relevant, why said advice consumer is concerned, and what action is recommended; and

an action button for providing said advice consumer with the ability to invoke an automatic execution of a recommended action.

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